

August 28, 2009

California High-Speed Train Update

Following are a few recent high-speed train news stories we want to make sure you see.

Give All The High Speed Rail Funds To California - [*Business Insider's Green Sheet*](#)

Aug. 25, 2009: Yesterday, a number of states applied for a share of the \$8 billion in stimulus spending on high speed rail.

They should all be rejected. Except for California, which should get all of it. And it should get the other \$5 billion coming down the pike.

Getting the country to build a better system of trains is darn near impossible. If we let \$8 billion scatter in staggered sums across the nation it's going to be tough to track how useful the money really is, making any further investment in trains difficult to justify, and open to more debate.

One of the biggest problems with building a high speed rail system in the United States, is all the unknowns. That's why we get highly questionable, back of the envelop guess work done by Harvard's Ed Glaeser.

If we built the train system proposed for California, we would get real, measurable, results. If the train is a flop, at least we'll know for sure. If it's a raging success, then we can choose the next part of the country in which to build a better train system.

However, if we give a \$76 million to North Carolina, and \$28 million to Pennsylvania, what will we really learn?

The Washington Post, citing a GAO study, says construction costs vary from \$22 million a mile to \$132 million a mile for high speed rail. At the low end of that estimate, that means North Carolina could lay out around 3.5 miles of track with its stimulus money.

California is ready to go. It has a plan in place for high speed rail system. California voters approved a \$9.95 billion bond sale to fund the rail line. Add in \$13 billion from the federal government, and the project is more than half way funded.

Last Friday we argued that we're just not the type of nation that can build big sweeping public work projects, and that's why our stimulus

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has seemed so pitiful. Here's a chance to prove us wrong.

We can get a big shiny play thing out of our stimulus. It's the type of project--whether it's successful, or a boondoggle--that we can say came about because of the Great Recession.

Of equal importance, we get to have a definitive test case about whether or not high tech trains can work here in the United States.

Spread the wealth around, and it's just going to look like more of the same.

Stimulus, Bond Funds Send High-Speed Rail On Its Way

San Diego Business Journal

Aug. 10, 2009: Piggybacking on President Obama's stimulus package, a high-speed rail system, similar to those in Europe and Japan, is being proposed in California to alleviate the load that existing transit lines such as highways and airports are under.

In San Diego County, organizations like the San Diego Association of Governments and California Department of Transportation are working in conjunction with the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the agency directly overseeing the project, to get the region ready for construction.

However, the program's first hurdle, financing, is still being settled.

"The California bond is a fortuitous down payment with Obama making it very clear that he wants high-speed rail to be part of his transportation legacy," said Lynn Schenk, a former Congresswoman and one of the original proponents of a high-speed rail system. "He's put together \$8 billion for the high-speed rail project with yearly increments built into the federal budget for the next five years."

The high-speed rail, or HSR, project's financing is coming from five different sources. About \$8 billion in federal funds for transportation projects are coming in from the stimulus package but rail planners won't know until October how much will come to California from the initial cut. Additionally, Obama is earmarking \$1 billion a year in the federal budget for HSR projects.

On a state level Proposition 1A, a \$9.95 billion bond measure that voters passed in November 2008, is providing financing for the project. The proposition is putting 90 percent of the funds towards specific projects, with federal and private matching monies required.

"Private sector investments, known as PPPs, or public-private partnerships, have been part of the HSR's financing options," said Schenk. "The request for an expression of interest was sent out last year to a variety of sources and the response has been very positive."

Desire To Expedite Project

Local funding is the project's final financing stream. Organizations and communities have put good-faith money towards the project to

expedite progress; however, the HSR's construction in San Diego will be deferred until later in the project timeline.

"The HSR project as it stands right now is a little ways off in San Diego County," says Bill Figge, deputy District 11 director of planning for Caltrans. "The first segment to be constructed is the Bay Area to Central Valley section so the San Diego line will probably be one of the last to be finished."

Despite the lack of immediacy to the region, Caltrans is busy preparing for the HSR project. The proposed area that the HSR rail would take locally is through the Interstate 15 corridor, so Caltrans and Sandag authorities are working with the High-Speed Rail Authority to lay out the line's path through San Diego County.

Once completed, the line will transport passengers from San Diego to Sacramento in 3 hours and 38 minutes, covering 588 miles for an estimated cost of \$68.

The train's efficiency will reduce the number of inter-city automobile passengers on freeways by millions of people, claims the HSR.

More on density and rail

[*New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman](#)

Aug. 26, 2009: I think we can agree that it's ridiculous to compare the average population density of the United States with that of European countries, and think that this says anything about transportation options. But I was curious, on my own account, to get a sense of the conditions under which large numbers of Americans live.

So I went to Census data, county level. It turns out that about a quarter of the population lives in counties that are as dense or denser than Mercer County, New Jersey, which is where I live. Now, most daily life in the Princeton area depends on cars; but for medium-distance travel, at least as far as DC, trains really dominate, even at current speeds. With European-level high-speed rail, I wouldn't fly anywhere in the Northeast Corridor. And while you can't just rely on the county population densities, I think it's fair to guess that at least a quarter of the US population is similarly positioned — which means that we've got a bigger potential market for fast rail than any European country.

Again, the real competition is for medium-distance travel, which means that we're mainly talking about rail versus air. For me, rail has several advantages that make it worth taking even if the terminal-to-terminal time is considerably longer than on air: less time on security lines; arrival in the city center, which is usually closer to where you want to go; electrical outlets!; and 3G internet as I travel.

Not everyone would find these advantages equally compelling. But you know, we don't need to have everyone taking the train. You can fly from Paris to Lyon, you can drive it, and some do. But a lot of people take the TGV, because for them it's better. In most of America, we don't have that option.

Find Out More

If your affiliated organization would like to learn more about the proposed high-speed train or have a transit-oriented event that could include high-speed train representation, please contact us to schedule; we will make every opportunity to honor your request.

Contact the California High Speed Rail Authority by visiting our website at:
<http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov> or call us at (916) 324-1541.

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